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Leader Behaviors as Mediators of the  
Leader Characteristics – Follower Satisfaction Relationship

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### Abstract

This study examined two potential mediators through which leaders transmit their position power into an effectiveness outcome. Drawing upon recent work integrating trait, situational, and behavioral theories of leadership effectiveness, we hypothesized and tested a model specifying that the interactive effects of leader position power and leader political skill on follower satisfaction would be mediated by followers' perceptions of leaders' initiating structure and consideration behaviors. Specifically, this model indicates that leaders who are both in powerful positions and politically skilled are perceived to initiate more structure and demonstrate more consideration for their followers than their non-politically skilled counterparts, which, in turn, positively impacts followers' satisfaction (i.e., an indication of subjective leadership effectiveness). Utilizing 190 leaders and 476 followers, we found support for the hypothesized model. Contributions to various literatures, strengths, limitations, and practical implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* Power, Political Skill, Initiating Structure, Consideration, Satisfaction

## Leader Behaviors as Mediators of the Leader Characteristics – Follower Satisfaction Relationship

People have warred over it and died in the pursuit of it. It has been seized, bought, and sometimes won; it has been brandished for good, but also for evil. This “it” is power, a ubiquitous and pervasive phenomenon that penetrates almost all aspects of life, from social relations, to organizational life, to government policy, and almost everywhere in between. Generally speaking, power can be defined as the ability to influence others (French & Raven, 1959). Studies of power largely have revolved around three main categories of inquiry; namely, the origins, correlates, and consequences of power (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003).

Nonetheless, little is known about the mechanisms through which uses of power influence affective reactions. From the few studies specifically examining the effects of power on followers in leader-follower relationships, research has found that leaders’ *possession* of position power is inconsistently related to followers’ satisfaction (Carson, Carson, & Roe, 1993; Koslowsky, Schwarzwald, & Ashuri, 2001). Arguably the simple possession of position power does not indicate whether or how a leader uses his or her power nor does the possession of power guarantee that the possessor is skilled at mobilizing his or her latent *capacity* to influence into *actual* influence. Thus, the inconsistency characteristic of past research most likely represents an oversimplification of the relationships between leader power and followers’ affective reactions to such power.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to address the missing linkages between leaders’ possession of power, how leaders mobilize such power, and how followers react to leaders in possession of power. We suggest that leader position power represents a leader situational characteristic that reflects a *capacity* or *potential* (Pfeffer, 1992) to influence others and, as such, this capacity requires the leader to engage in necessary behaviors in order to transfer potential influence into actual influence. We examine initiating structure and

consideration as two broad categories of behaviors by which leaders are hypothesized to mobilize their position power into influence. Followers who perceive their leaders to engage in more structuring and consideration behaviors are argued to report heightened job satisfaction, a notion echoed in meta-analytic research on initiating structure and consideration (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004).

This rationale is in keeping with scholars' recent calls for research examining the process by which leader traits influence leader behaviors and ultimately leader effectiveness (e.g., DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009). For instance, DeRue et al. (2011) presented an integrated conceptual framework of leadership effectiveness, which suggests that leader traits/characteristics (e.g., gender, conscientiousness, political skill) are related to leadership effectiveness (e.g., task performance, follower satisfaction) through leader behaviors (e.g., initiating structure, consideration). Similarly, Judge et al. (2009) proposed a model which, at its core, suggests that traits affect leader emergence through certain mediators (e.g., skills, abilities, providing meaning) and, in turn, ultimately result in subjective as well as objective leadership effectiveness.

Both conceptualizations imply that, rather than just who leaders are (i.e., traits), what their situation is like, or what they do (i.e., behaviors), it is the interplay of all three that shapes whether leaders are successful. Therefore, we examine the process through which a leader situational characteristic (i.e., position power) and a leader trait (i.e., political skill) combine to influence subjective leader effectiveness (i.e., follower job satisfaction) through followers' perceptions of leader behaviors (i.e., initiating structure, consideration). Additionally, as an extension of these recent conceptualizations, we draw from research on political skill (Ferris et al., 2005) to examine the moderating effect of leader political skill on the leader position power – initiating structure/consideration relationships.

We suggest that *how* leaders exercise their position power affects followers' perceptions of the extent to which such leaders initiate structure and provide consideration

and, ultimately, followers' affective reactions. Specifically, we suggest that politically skilled leaders are more likely to mobilize their position power in such a way that they are perceived by followers to be more actively engaged in defining, organizing, and orienting them towards goal attainment (i.e., initiating structure; Fleishman, 1973). In addition, we suggest that politically skilled leaders will be more able to deploy their position power in a manner that is perceived by followers as more considerate, respectful, and indicative of a relationship founded on mutual trust and appreciation (i.e., consideration; Bass, 1990).

In doing so, we intend to make several contributions to the literature. First, in response to recent calls to examine the process through which leader traits and behaviors influence leader effectiveness (e.g., DeRue et al 2011), we examine how leader traits/characteristics (i.e., position power, political skill) influence follower satisfaction through followers' perceptions of leader behaviors. Additionally, we add to the sparse literature examining followers' reactions to leaders' possession and use of power. Specifically, we maintain that followers will perceive their leaders to engage in more structuring and consideration and, in turn, be more satisfied, when their leaders deploy their power in a politically skilled manner.

Further, this paper bolsters the initiating structure and consideration literatures, which have witnessed resurgence in popularity in recent years (Piccolo et al., 2012). Leaders with position power must transmit their capacity to influence into actual influence via behavior. We examine whether some of the ways they do so is via structuring and consideration behaviors. Moreover, we add to the literature on initiating structure and consideration by examining factors capable of influencing followers' perceptions of the extent to which their leaders engage in such structuring or consideration behaviors. Additionally, we contribute to the political skill literature by examining the positive effects of political skill on others, not just as a self-benefitting resource. Lastly, we respond to recent calls for research examining the interactionist perspective (e.g., van Knippenberg, 2012) in that we examine the combined

effect of the “person-in-situation” (i.e., politically skilled leader in position of power) on leadership outcomes.

In sum, the hypothesized research model tested in this study is presented in Figure 1. The model hypothesizes that the interaction of *leader position power*  $\times$  *leader political skill* influences follower satisfaction through followers’ perceptions of leaders’ initiating structure and consideration behaviors. The following sections provide theoretical rationale for the testable hypothesis with regard to the aforementioned substantive relationships of interest.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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### Theoretical Foundations and Hypothesis Development

Due to the hierarchical structure of organizations, position power is inherent in all leader-follower relationships. In fact, the leader-follower relationship is clouded with ambivalence because followers are keenly aware of the opportunity for their leaders to exploit them due to their hierarchical inferiority (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). Hence, the present study focuses solely on position (i.e., formal) power, which we define as an individual’s capacity to control others’ organizational outcomes as a function of their formal hierarchical position. Unfortunately, although much is known about the sources of power (Emerson, 1962; French & Raven, 1959; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), very little research has addressed followers’ reactions to leaders’ wielding of power or even the level of power held by leaders (for an exception, see Martinez, Kane, Ferris, & Brooks, 2012).

Of the handful of studies specifically examining the consequences of power for followers in leader-follower dyads, research has demonstrated inconsistent results concerning the relationships between leaders’ use of position (formal) power and attitudinal outcomes such as satisfaction (Carson et al., 1993; Koslowsky et al., 2001). Specifically, whereas Carson et al. (1993) found evidence to suggest that leaders’ formal power demonstrated no

impact on follower satisfaction, Koslowsky et al. (2001) found that leaders' positional (i.e., hard) power was significantly negatively related to follower satisfaction.

However, how leaders are regarded (i.e., powerful versus non-powerful) does little to suggest how or why they are able to lead effective teams (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008); thus, it is not surprising that leader power has been inconsistently related to follower satisfaction. This lack of consistency is perhaps due to the fact that the mere possession of position power reveals little about what leaders actually *do* with such power. Furthermore, Morgeson and colleagues (2007) pointed out that leaders' perceived influence is not synonymous with leadership effectiveness. Instead, we suggest that it is what leaders actually *do* with their perceived influence that impacts effectiveness outcomes.

Therefore, in keeping with DeRue et al. (2011), we suggest that leader traits and situational characteristics influence leader effectiveness through leader behavior. More specifically, we suggest that leaders with position power can influence follower job satisfaction by engaging or not engaging in certain behaviors aimed at defining and clarifying followers' tasks, goals, and acceptable work standards (i.e., initiating structure behavior) and by providing or not providing concern for follower welfare and acting in a friendly and supportive manner (i.e., consideration behavior).

However, it is important to note that DeRue et al.'s (2011) conceptualization of leader traits is more in keeping with a broader and more recent definition of leader traits as "relatively coherent and integrated patterns of personal characteristics, reflecting a range of individual differences that foster consistent leadership effectiveness across a variety of group and organizational situations" (Zaccaro, 2007, p. 7). This definition conceptualizes leader traits as a host of individual differences (e.g., expertise, social effectiveness competencies, personality attributes) (Zaccaro, 2007). As such, in keeping with both Zaccaro (2007) and DeRue et al. (2011), the nomenclature "traits/characteristics" is used to refer to all such individual differences. Further in keeping with recent research (e.g., Judge et al., 2009), we

distinguish subjective from objective leader effectiveness. The former (i.e., subjective leader effectiveness) encompasses follower attitudes, follower reactions to the leader, and follower perceptions of leader effectiveness, whereas the latter (i.e., objective leader effectiveness) encompasses more quantifiable outcomes (e.g., unit performance).

### *Leader Position Power, Initiating Structure, and Consideration*

Initiating structure and consideration reflect two broad, yet critical, sets of leader behaviors with well-documented relationships with a number of leader effectiveness outcomes (e.g., group-performance, follower satisfaction; Judge et al., 2004). However, leaders with high position power do not necessarily engage in structuring behavior. They also can abuse their power for domineering behavior, management by crisis, laissez faire behavior, or ad hoc decision making. In addition, instead of engaging in consideration behaviors, leaders with high position power can act harshly and in an intimidating manner (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007).

Thus, while leaders with position power can engage in both sets of these critical leader behaviors, it is unlikely that all such leaders will do so. Specifically, we propose that this choice depends on leaders' social savoir faire or "political skill." The inclusion of political skill as a moderator of the leader position power – initiating structure/consideration relationships suggests that not only situational characteristics (position power) but also leaders' political skill jointly determine subjective leader effectiveness outcomes (i.e., in this case, follower job satisfaction) through followers' perceptions of leader behaviors.

### *Political Skill*

Formally defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127), political skill affords individuals the ability to understand the complexities of the social environment, comprehend the motivations of others, adapt their behavior to what is situationally appropriate, exercise subtle influence



over others, forge beneficial relationships with others, and manage interpersonal conflict skillfully. In addition, politically skilled individuals are able to execute influence attempts in a manner that is perceived as sincere, genuine, and devoid of ulterior motives (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012). The political skill of leaders has been shown to influence follower effectiveness as well as follower citizenship behavior through leader-follower relationship quality (Brouer, Douglas, Treadway, & Ferris, 2013), contributing to the growing body of evidence suggesting that the benefits of political skill are not just self-experienced, but can be enjoyed by organizational others as well.

Therefore, drawing on recently articulated conceptualizations of political skill (Ferris et al., 2007), the model tested in this study (Figure 1) hypothesizes the moderating effect of leader political skill on the relationship between leader position power and followers' perceptions of the extent to which leaders engage in initiating structure and consideration behaviors. We suggest that political skill moderates the aforementioned relationships as this construct taps *how* (i.e., the *savoir faire* with which) leaders translate their power into behaviors followers perceive as both genuinely considerate and adequately structuring.

*Political skill as a moderator of the power – initiating structure relationship.* We feel that leaders who are both politically skilled and in possession of position power will be perceived by followers to initiate greater amounts of structure, because by definition, politically skilled individuals are able to artfully package directives in a manner that is convincing not abrasive, boorish, or slipshod. Furthermore, structuring behaviors include defining roles, orienting followers towards goal attainment, and establishing clear channels of communication (Fleishman, 1973); politically skilled leaders, by definition, are able to sense the needs and motivations of their followers, so they should be attuned to when followers are in need of specific and goal-oriented structuring behaviors and behave in ways to address these needs, and are able to package their behaviors in ways that are indicative of, and perceived by followers to be, initiating structure.

Although all leaders with position power are capable of forcibly and heavy-handedly structuring tasks and setting goals for their followers, we feel that politically skilled leaders would rely more on their abilities to influence followers' understanding of the directives, and garner their commitment toward specific plans of action in compelling ways that preserve positive follower affective reactions. Thus, followers of leaders imbued with both position power and political skill will perceive their leaders to initiate greater amounts of structure, as leaders are hypothesized to do so by clearly and carefully defining roles and orienting followers towards specific goals (Treadway, Bentley, & Williams, in press). In keeping with this perspective, Hardy (1985) suggested that leaders who are able to *unobtrusively* use their power will be able to "achieve substantive outcomes by influencing sentiments such that outcomes are deemed legitimate, inevitable or acceptable" (p. 390).

We also hypothesize that leaders who simply brandish their position power without any savvy or sophistication (i.e., political skill) will not be perceived by followers as engaged in as much task structuring behavior. The intended structuring behaviors of leaders who have position power but little sophistication or savvy will likely be perceived by followers as simply being bossy and heavy-handed. Directives under such a leader are likely to be perceived as imposed; as such, followers will be unlikely to perceive the leader to engage in role-clarifying behaviors characteristic of structuring but instead will perceive leaders to engage in simply role-assigning. Further, followers will likely perceive leaders with position power and no political skill to decree communication in a unidirectional, top-down manner.

*Hypothesis 1:* Political skill will moderate the relationship between leader position power and followers' perception of leaders' behaviors, such that leaders with both position power and political skill will be perceived as initiating more structuring behaviors, whereas leaders with position power but little political skill will be perceived as initiating less structure.

*Political skill as a moderator of the power – consideration relationship.* Moreover, we hypothesize that politically skilled leaders will engage in, and be perceived as engaging in, greater amounts of consideration behaviors, as, by definition, politically skilled leaders are keenly aware of their followers' needs and emotions and are able to appear sincere, genuine, and empathetic. Specifically, at their core, politically skilled individuals are apparently sincere in that they are able to appear well-intentioned, genuine, empathetic, and are able to disguise ulterior motives, should they exist (Ferris et al., 2005).

Furthermore, politically skilled individuals are keenly self-aware in that they understand how their actions are perceived and interpreted by others; Pfeffer (1992) suggested that it is this "sensitivity to others" that allows politically skilled individuals to capitalize on the social environment and obtain desired outcomes. Moreover, politically skilled individuals are able to present themselves in a desirable manner and are able to effectively adapt their behavior to what is required of the situation. Collectively, we hypothesize that the aforementioned characteristics of politically skilled leaders imbue them with the ability to present themselves as more relationally-oriented than their non-politically skilled peers.

Thus, leaders who are both politically skilled and in possession of position power should be perceived by followers as more respectful, empathetic, concerned for their well-being, supportive, and appreciative, as politically skilled individuals by definition are able to appear genuine and sincere, be sensitive to the needs of others, and act in socially accepted ways. Moreover, politically skilled leaders should also objectively *engage* in more considerate behaviors. Specifically, by way of their social astuteness, politically skilled leaders will be able to sense what their followers need and desire in terms of relational-oriented consideration behaviors and, in turn, engage in the behaviors that appeal to their followers' needs, emotions, and motivations. Hence, followers are hypothesized to perceive these leaders as engaged in more consideration behaviors, as they are likely to perceive their politically skilled leaders' behavior to more adequately reflect the behaviors characteristic of consideration.

We also hypothesize that followers will not perceive leaders with position power but little (or no) political skill to engage in as much consideration behavior. Specifically, without political skill, such behaviors may not be expressed in such a way as to be perceived as considerate, genuine, or sincere. Further, leaders with position power but little to no political skill might be less adept at packaging their behaviors such that followers perceive their welfare to be of central focus for the leader. Therefore, we suggest that politically skilled and positionally powerful leaders will be perceived as engaged in *more* consideration behaviors, as their behaviors are likely to be packaged in such a way that they are undoubtedly perceived as consideration behaviors that genuinely and more fully address followers' relational needs and welfare.

*Hypothesis 2:* Political skill will moderate the relationship between leader position power and followers' perception of leaders' behaviors, such that leaders with both position power and political skill will be perceived as engaging in more consideration behaviors, whereas leaders with position power but little political skill will be perceived as engaging in less consideration behaviors.

#### *Initiating Structure as a Predictor of Follower Job Satisfaction*

Further, in keeping with meta-analytic evidence documenting the positive relationship between initiating structure and follower satisfaction (Judge et al., 2004), we suggest that followers will report satisfaction when they perceive their leaders to structure their organizational roles, explicitly define tasks, and orient them towards goal attainment (Fleishman & Peters, 1962). Such behaviors enveloped under initiating structure are thought to influence follower satisfaction, as they (at least in part) enable leaders to carry out their role as managers and creators of shared meaning (Pfeffer, 1981; Sederberg, 1984).

Meaning creation and sense giving are critical leader functions (Pfeffer, 1981; Sederberg, 1984). Specifically, a leader's role as a sense giver is to shape, mold, and/or influence followers' attitudes and cognitions concerning organizational realities (Gioia &

Chittipeddi, 1991) and orient followers toward desirable end states (Treadway et al., in press). In support, research has demonstrated that leaders' "everyday sense giving" has a positive effect on followers' affective (i.e., sentiment) outcomes (Smith, Plowman, & Duchon, 2010).

*Hypothesis 3:* Followers' perceptions of leaders' structuring behaviors will be positively related to follower job satisfaction.

#### *Consideration as a Predictor of Follower Job Satisfaction*

Further, we suggest that followers will report heightened satisfaction when they perceive their leaders to engage in relationship-oriented behaviors (i.e., consideration). Leaders who are perceived to engage in consideration behaviors are (or appear to be), above all else, empathetic, approachable, supportive, friendly, respectful, and appreciative. In addition, they are (or appear to be) concerned with the well-being of each of their followers, desire working relationships characterized by trust and mutual understanding, and are attuned to the needs of their followers (Bass, 1990). As such, followers whose leaders (are perceived to) demonstrate higher levels of consideration behaviors should be more satisfied with their jobs as such behaviors fulfill followers' basic needs for interpersonal connectedness. Specifically, according to Baumeister and Leary (1995), individuals have an innate desire to establish and maintain social connections that are pleasant, conflict-free, and marked by "affective concern" (p. 500). As such, leaders' consideration behaviors appeal to followers' needs for meaningful social connections which, in turn, should engender affective well-being.

*Hypothesis 4:* Followers' perceptions of leaders' consideration behaviors will be positively related to follower job satisfaction.

#### *Hypothesized Mediated Moderation Model*

Collectively, the foregoing discussion makes reference to the full hypothesized research model presented in Figure 1, which hypothesizes that leaders with formal power are perceived to show concern for their followers and structure the organizational environment and requisite tasks for followers, which, in turn, influences followers' satisfaction, depending

on the leader's level of political skill. That is, the model suggests that the interaction of leader position power and leader political skill influences follower satisfaction through followers' perceptions of leader initiating structure and consideration behaviors.

Consequently, we test a mediated moderation hypothesis. As outlined by Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt (2005), the difference between mediated moderation and moderated mediation is that in the former there is an overall moderation effect, which is reduced when controlled for a mediator. In the latter case, there is a direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, but the value of the mediation effect depends on a moderator.

*Hypothesis 5:* The conditional indirect effect of leader position power and political skill on follower satisfaction is mediated by followers' perceptions of leaders' behaviors. For leaders high (low) in political skill, increases in leader position power are related to increases (decreases) in follower satisfaction through increases (decreases) in followers' perceptions of leader structuring behaviors.

*Hypothesis 6:* The conditional indirect effect of leader position power and political skill on follower satisfaction is mediated by followers' perceptions of leaders' behaviors. For leaders high (low) in political skill, increases in leader position power are related to increases (decreases) in follower satisfaction through increases (decreases) in followers' perceptions of leader consideration behaviors.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

We conducted the study in a large industrial region in the western part of Germany. Leaders were identified based on private referrals and contacted personally via email and asked to participate in the study. Participants had to be currently active in a leadership position in an organization with at least five followers directly reporting to them. Participants received individual feedback on their political skill at work after the data collection was finished.

Of the 1320 leaders personally contacted, 499 agreed to participate in the study, and therefore, received an email with the web link and the personal code. With 190 leaders, we received surveys from at least one employee reporting directly to her/him. There were 22 unique leader-follower dyads, 50 leaders with two followers participating in the study, and 118 leaders with three followers participating in the study. Thus, among the leaders, the return rate was 38% and among the followers the return rate was 82%.

Of the leaders participating, 128 (67%) were males and 62 were females. The mean age of the leaders was 46.3 years. They worked in a broad variety of different industries and 66% of them had a masters-level education. On average, they had been working for 8.6 years in their current job, had on average 26.3 individuals reporting directly to them, and had been working with their leader for an average of 5.3 years.

### *Measures*

*Leader position power.* Building on previous research on bases of power in organizations (Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985; Raven, Schwarzwald, & Koslowsky, 1998), leader self-rated position power was assessed using three items. “I control ...for hiring new followers ...for increase in pay of my followers, and ...for promotions of my followers.” (5 = complete control, 4 = main control, 3 = partial control, 2 = minor control, 1 = no control)<sup>1</sup>. It is not appropriate to report internal consistency reliability estimates because in Germany, leader position power is indicative of a formative composite construct (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Jarvis, 2005). Thus, the full meaning of the composite construct is derived from its facet measures, which are not assumed to be highly correlated.

*Leader political skill.* The German version (Blickle et al., 2008) of the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) was used to assess leaders’ self-reported political skill with 18 items (Ferris et

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<sup>1</sup> This measure does *not* tap direct work assignments, schedules, or other working conditions that are under the control of the leader because Germany’s “*work safety act*” holds all supervisors directly liable for these work conditions (Stürk, 1998). Therefore, measuring the aforementioned conditions this would not have served to adequately differentiate the position power between leaders.

al., 2005). The PSI uses a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). “I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say and do to influence others” represents a sample item. The reliability estimate for this measure was adequate ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

*Perceived initiating structure.* We used 15 items from the German version (Piccolo et al., 2012) of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) (Halpin, 1957) to measure the extent to which followers perceived their leader to initiate structure. For example, followers were asked to indicate the frequency with which their leader engaged in behaviors such as emphasizing meeting deadlines or setting performance standards. Each item was answered based on 5-point Likert-scale from 1 = never to 5 = always. The reliability of the scale was sufficient ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Perceived consideration.* We used 15 items from the German version (Piccolo et al., 2012) of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) (Halpin, 1957) to measure the extent to which followers perceived their leader to engage in consideration behaviors. For example, followers were asked to indicate the frequency with which their leader engaged in behaviors such as taking time to listen to followers or translating follower suggestions into practice. Each item was answered based on a 5-point Likert-scale from 1 = never to 5 = always. The reliability of the scale was adequate ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

*Follower job satisfaction.* We used the Weymann (2001) satisfaction scale to operationalize the dependent variable in this study. Follower job satisfaction was assessed with 13 items reflecting followers’ (self-rated) satisfaction with various aspects of the situation at work (e.g., income, job content, organizational climate, fit of job demands and individual qualifications). The Likert-type items range from 1 = very unsatisfactory to 5 = very satisfactory. The reliability of the employee satisfaction scale was good ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Control variables.* Recent research has demonstrated the impact of leader gender (Taylor & Hood, 2011) and age (Zacher, Rosing, Henning, & Frese, 2011) on perceptions of leaders’ social skill and success. Therefore, we controlled for both leaders’ gender and age.



## Data Analysis

*Rating aggregation for initiating structure, consideration and job satisfaction variables.* In order to gain a more representative measure of the satisfaction, initiating structure, and consideration with a particular leader, we solicited three follower ratings for each leader and aggregated these ratings for each leader. Intraclass correlation, or ICC(1) (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979), was computed in order to estimate whether followers reporting to the same leader “agree” in their responses. ICC(1) reflects the proportion of variance in followers’ responses accounted for by differences in leaders. James (1982) reported values of ICC(1) ranging from 0 to .50, with a median of ICC(1) = .12. In the present study, the ICC(1) for follower job satisfaction was .18. From these findings, and based on James (1982), we concluded that the follower data satisfy the conditions for being aggregated across leaders to obtain an average. For perceived initiating structure and consideration, the ICC(1) were .32 and .36, respectively. These were satisfying findings to aggregate across leaders to get an aggregated measurement as well.

Because the leaders nominated which employees would assess them, there could have been a selection bias. We tested this possibility by examining the means and the distribution of the aggregated satisfaction, initiating structure, and consideration variables. The means were in the range of means of other studies [ $M_{\text{Initiating Structure}} = 3.45 (SD = .45)$ ,  $3.07 (SD = .73) \leq M_{\text{Initiating Structure}} \leq 3.76 (SD = .62)$  (Piccolo et al., 2012, Table 2),  $M_{\text{Consideration}} = 3.83 (SD = .48)$ ,  $3.48 (SD = .89) \leq M_{\text{Consideration}} \leq 3.83 (SD = .66)$  (Piccolo et al., 2012, Table 2),  $M_{\text{Job Satisfaction}} = 3.82 (SD = .43)$  vs.  $M_{\text{Job Satisfaction}} = 3.88 (SD = .58)$  (Ewen et al., 2013)].

Additionally, if a selection bias was present, the distributions of these variables would be non-normal. However, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test, examining normal distributions of scores, was not significant for follower job satisfaction ( $Z = 1.353$ ,  $p > .05$ ), perceived initiating structure ( $Z = 1.103$ ,  $p > .05$ ) or for perceived consideration ( $Z = 1.323$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Taken together, these findings do not support a selection bias.

*Hypotheses testing.* We used hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) to test our hypotheses. Either perceived initiating structure or consideration served as our dependent variable in the analyses of Hypothesis 1 and 2. In the first step of each analysis we entered the control variables (i.e., gender and age; Model 1 and Model 4 in Table 2). In the second step we entered leader position power and leader political skill (Model 2 and Model 5 in Table 2). We entered the interaction term of leader position power x leader political skill in the third step (Model 3 and Model 6 in Table 2). Leader position power and political skill were centered prior to the analyses (Cohen et al., 2003). Hypothesis 1 and 2 would be confirmed if the interaction terms of leader position power x leader political skill on perceived initiating structure and perceived consideration, respectively, are significant and positive (Model 3 and Model 6 in Table 2).

To test Hypothesis 3 and 4, we used follower job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Again, the control variables (age and gender) were entered in the first step (Model 7 in Table 3) followed by both perceived initiating structure and perceived consideration together in the second step (Model 8a in Table 3). These hypotheses would be supported if the coefficients for both initiating structure and consideration were significant and positive.

To test the mediated moderation effects (Hypotheses 5 and 6), we followed the necessary conditions outlined by Muller et al. (2005). To establish mediated moderation, there has to be a) a moderation effect (i.e., leader position power x leader political skill ) on the dependent variable (i.e. follower job satisfaction; Model 9 in Table 3), b) a direct effect of the mediators (i.e., perceived initiating structure and consideration) on the dependent variable (Hypotheses 3 and 4, Model 8a in Table 3), c) a moderation effect on the proposed mediator (Hypotheses 1 and 2, Model 3 and Model 6 in Table 2) and d) a reduced moderation effect on the dependent variable when the proposed mediator is entered (Model 10 in Table 3).

Therefore, in order to test Hypotheses 5 and 6, we used follower job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Again, age and gender were entered in the first step of the regression

analysis (Model 7 in Table 3). In the second step, we added the centered variables of leader position power and leader political skill (Model 8b in Table 3). To test a necessary requirement for Hypotheses 5 and 6, we entered the interaction term of position power x leader political skill in the third step (Model 9 in Table 3). If this step is significant and positive, the first condition (as outlined above) for the mediated moderation effect would be confirmed. In the fourth step, we entered perceived initiating structure and consideration (Model 10 in Table 3). If both predictors (i.e., perceived initiating structure and consideration) are significant, whereas the interaction term of position power x leader political skill is no longer significant, this situation would meet the fourth condition for Hypotheses 5 and 6.

We then computed the indirect effects of the position power x leader political skill interaction on either perceived initiating structure or perceived consideration. To test the significance of these indirect effects, we used Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications. Monte Carlo simulation is a powerful and simple to use technique to compute confidence intervals for indirect effects (Preacher & Selig, 2012). Hypotheses 5 and 6 would be confirmed if the indirect effects were positive and the corresponding confidence intervals do not include zero.

## Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistency reliability estimates of the study variables. Leader age correlated positively with follower job satisfaction ( $r = .15, p < .05$ ) and leader political skill ( $r = .17, p < .05$ ). Gender was not significantly associated with any study variables. Leader political skill and leader position power correlated positively ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ). As a necessary requirement for our hypotheses, we found a significant correlation between perceived initiating structure and follower job satisfaction ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ) and between perceived consideration and follower job satisfaction ( $r = .51, p < .01$ ).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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### *Results of Regression Analyses*

The results of the regression analyses are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analyses with either perceived initiating structure or perceived consideration as the dependent variable. Results of these analyses indicated the direct effect of leader position power is not significant for either perceived initiating structure ( $\beta = -.08$ , *ns*; Model 2) or perceived consideration ( $\beta = -.10$ , *ns*; Model 5).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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As hypothesized, political skill moderated the relationships between leader position power and perceived initiating structure ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Model 3) and leader position power and perceived consideration ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .051$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $p < .051$ ; Model 6). The form of both interaction terms was illustrated according to the procedure proposed by Cohen et al. (2003) using an online tool provided by Meier (2008).

Figure 2 shows the plot for the interaction effect on perceived initiating structure. As can be seen, when political skill was low, the perception of initiating structure decreased significantly with increasing leader position power ( $b = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When political skill was high, there were non-significant changes in perceived initiating structure with increasing position power ( $b = .11$ , *ns*). Thus, these results partially confirm Hypothesis 1.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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The interaction effect on perceived consideration is depicted in Figure 3. When political skill was low, increases in leader position power led to a significant decrease in

perceived consideration ( $b = -.16, p < .05$ ). However, when political skill was high, there were again non-significant changes in perceived consideration with increasing leader position power ( $b = .05, ns.$ ). Thus, these results partially confirm Hypothesis 2.

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 Insert Figure 3 about here  
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Table 3 shows the results of the regression analyses on follower job satisfaction. As can be seen in Model 8a both initiating structure ( $\beta = .16, p < .05$ ) and consideration ( $\beta = .46, p < .01$ ) had a positive significant effect on follower job satisfaction explaining together 30% incremental variance in follower job satisfaction. These results confirm Hypotheses 3 and 4, respectively, as well as confirming a condition for the mediated moderation hypothesis.

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 Insert Table 3 about here  
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In confirmation of the requirements for Hypotheses 5 and 6, the interaction term of leader position power x political skill had a significant influence on follower job satisfaction ( $\beta = .17, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .03, p < .05$ ; Model 9). Again, the interaction was illustrated according to the procedure proposed by Cohen et al. (2003). Figure 4 shows the corresponding plot. Increases in leader position power led to increases in follower job satisfaction when political skill was high ( $b = .15, p < .05$ ). When political skill was low, increases in leader position power resulted in non-significant changes in follower job satisfaction ( $b = -.06, ns$ ).

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 Insert Figure 4 about here  
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Model 10 in Table 3 shows the results of last necessary condition to test Hypotheses 5 and 6. Specifically, when initiating structure and consideration were included in the model, both had a significant influence on follower job satisfaction ( $\beta = .14, p < .05, \beta = .47, p < .01$ , respectively,  $\Delta R^2 = .28, p < .01$ ), but the interaction effect of leader position power and political skill was no longer significant ( $\beta = .07, ns.$ ).

Given that all necessary requirements are met, we computed the indirect effect of the interaction term through initiating structure or consideration. For initiating structure, the indirect effect of leader position power x political skill on follower job satisfaction was .03 ( $p < .05$ ; 95% CI based on 20,000 Monte Carlo replications = [.0014; .0670]). The indirect effect of leader position power x political skill on follower satisfaction via consideration was .06 ( $p < .05$ ; 95% CI based on 20,000 Monte Carlo replications = [.0001; .1267]). Thus, these results provide support for both Hypotheses 5 and 6.

### Discussion

We hypothesized that politically skilled leaders would be able to deploy their position power in such a way that followers would perceive them to be more actively engaged in structuring (e.g., defining, organizing) and consideration behaviors (i.e., building relationships on mutual trust, showing concern for follower welfare), which, in turn, would result in enhanced follower satisfaction. Results for the most part provided support for our hypotheses.

It is worth noting that the effects of leader position power on follower job satisfaction appear to be entirely indirect. The indirect first-stage moderation hypothesis was supported, demonstrating that there were changing relationships between leader position power and initiating structure and leader position power and consideration across varying levels of leader political skill. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that both leader initiating structure and consideration behaviors mediated the moderated relationship (i.e., leader position power x leader political skill) on follower job satisfaction.

Nonetheless, it appears that the moderating effects of political skill are more pronounced when leaders have high position power but low amounts of political skill. Specifically, followers' perceptions of their leaders' structuring and consideration behaviors decline significantly when leaders are high in position power but low in political skill. Nonetheless, we did not detect significant changes in followers' perceptions of their leaders' structuring and consideration behaviors when leaders were both high in position power and political skill. This suggests that the *lack of* political skill is quite detrimental to leaders with position power as such leaders are perceived by followers as engaging in lower amounts of structuring and consideration, behaviors considered critical to follower well-being.

#### *Contributions of the Study*

The present study makes several notable contributions to the literature. First, this study answers past (House & Aditya, 1997) and present (DeRue et al., 2011) appeals for increased research examining the *process* by which leader traits/characteristics and behaviors influence leadership effectiveness outcomes. By demonstrating that the leader position power x leader political skill interaction favorably influences follower satisfaction (i.e., a subjective leader effectiveness outcome) through leader initiating structure and consideration behaviors, we provide additional support for the integrated model of traits/characteristics, behaviors, and leadership effectiveness posited by DeRue and colleagues (2011), and extend their model slightly to include leader situational characteristics.

Furthermore, although power is thought to be best understood through relationships (Emerson, 1962), few studies have examined follower reactions to leader position power, and the intermediate linkages through which leader position power might operate (for an exception, see Martinez et al., 2012). Therefore, this study contributes to the limited organizational science research on follower reactions to leader power. Rather than examining how individuals acquire power, whether through structural positioning or personal characteristics, the present study focused on *how* leaders' position power is deployed in the

workplace, and the ramifications of such power deployments. Collectively, it is apparent that the manner in which leaders deploy and leverage their position power ultimately influences followers' organizational experiences and subsequent attitudinal reactions.

Additionally, this study contributes to the initiating structure and consideration literature because it examines leader trait and situational characteristics thought to influence how leaders' behaviors are perceived as initiating structure and consideration. Specifically, our results suggested that leaders who possess both position power and political skill are perceived by followers to initiate more structure and consideration behaviors than their non-politically skilled peers which in turn predicted follower satisfaction. As such, we feel this study provides preliminary insight into followers' reactions to leaders' behaviors, because it suggests that followers' affective reactions to leaders' deployment of position power depends on leaders' political skill and that this relationship is mediated by leader behavior being perceived as structuring and considerate. Moreover, this research takes an interactionist perspective and in doing so answers calls for research examining the combined effects of "person-in-situation" (e.g., van Knippenberg, 2012).

Finally, this research contributes to the growing body of literature that examines the effect of political skill on *others*, not just as a resource that can be used to buffer workplace stressor – strain relationships pertaining just to the self ( Perrewé et al., 2004), or simply to achieve personal career success (Blickle, Oerder, & Summers, 2010), for example. In other words, political skill is not just a self-benefitting resource, but also is shown to benefit others.

#### *Strengths and Limitations*

The strengths and limitations of this study warrant mention. Notable strengths include the collection of data from both leaders and followers, which minimizes concerns about the presence of common method bias (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Additionally, the sample was fairly large for dyadic research and directly tapped the focal group of interest—namely, actual leaders with a number of direct reports and sufficient (i.e., 5



or more years) on-the-job experience. Further, all scales used to operationalize study variables of interest had been previously validated and demonstrated strong psychometric properties.

A limitation of the present research is the cross-sectional design of the study, which does not allow a clear temporal ordering of the causal variables. Another limitation is that the leader-follower units were from different organizations. Thus, unknown variables could not be held constant. At the same time, sampling leader-follower units from a broad range of organizations ensures a high degree of generalizability of findings, as well as variability in the study variables which renders high power to the statistical analyses.

Another consideration is the cultural context of our study. Previous empirical research (see Erez, 2011, for a review) has shown that the German and the United States cultures share a number of important features in the work context (i.e., high masculinity and low power distance) but differ somewhat on others (i.e., uncertainty avoidance and individualism). Nonetheless, due to the absence of dramatic cultural differences, we feel that these results are likely to generalize to US organizations. However, future research is needed to test the generalizability to other cultural contexts (e.g., Asia) (Erez, 2011).

#### *Directions for Future Research*

There are a number of future research opportunities stemming from the current investigation. Future research should examine how politically skilled leaders mobilize other sources or bases of power (e.g., soft power)<sup>2</sup>. For example, politically skilled leaders with referent power may be more likely to engage in networking, mentoring, and socialization behaviors than their non-politically skilled peers, which in turn could influence subordinates' leader-directed (e.g., perceived supervisor support) and organizational attitudes (e.g., organizational identification). Future research should explore these possibilities and others.

Further, while we relied explicitly on followers' perceptions of the extent to which their leaders engaged in consideration and structuring behaviors, future research should

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<sup>2</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this.

examine whether politically skilled leaders actually *do* engage in more structuring and consideration behaviors or if they are only perceived as doing so. Our belief is that politically skilled leaders are not only perceived to engage in these behaviors, but also objectively engage in them as compared to their non-politically skilled peers<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, whereas the reconsideration of initiating structure and consideration in the leadership literature is warranted and promising, most studies investigating these leader behaviors have examined their influence on leader effectiveness outcomes without examining how they come to be in the first place. Therefore, future research should continue to explore precisely the characteristics of leaders who demonstrate such behaviors.

### *Practical Implications*

A number of practical implications are also notable. First, the results indicate that the followers' perceptions of the extent to which leaders engage in initiating structure and consideration behaviors are positively related to follower satisfaction. Thus, followers seem satisfied when their leaders set clear roles, establish deadlines, and define clear patterns of communication and treat them with respect, demonstrate concern, and express appreciation. This affirms the effectiveness of both types of critical leader behavior.

This study provides further evidence that political skill is a critical workplace competency, with benefits for both the self and others. This research seems to suggest that political skill is not only something that can help an individual get ahead in organizations, but also potentially to assist in the better leadership of followers and to contribute to followers' increased positive attitudes. Furthermore, leaders in formal positions of power should be cognizant of how they demonstrate their power. Results affirm that it is not enough to simply possess position power, but one must know how to effectively mobilize and leverage it; political skill is quite impactful in this regard. From a practical standpoint, if individuals lack political skill, it seems worthwhile that they work towards developing the skill set; in fact,

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<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this.

scholars suggest political skill is a learnable and trainable skill that is enhanced through, among many things, dramaturgical training (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005).

### *Conclusion*

In keeping with recent research integrating trait, situational, and behavioral perspectives of leadership effectiveness, the present study examined two potential mediational chains through which leaders were hypothesized to transmit their position power into subjective leadership effectiveness outcomes. Specifically, this model indicates that leaders who are both in powerful positions and politically skilled initiate structure and provide consideration behaviors for their followers, which positively impact followers' satisfaction (i.e., an indication of subjective leadership effectiveness). The results provided support for the hypothesized model. It is our hope that this study provides additional support for models of leadership that consider leader traits/characteristics, situational characteristics, *and* leader behaviors, as well as research that examines boundary conditions under which specific leader behaviors are more or less effective.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities for the Study Variables*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Leader Age	46.3	9.55							
2. Leader Gender	1.33	.47	-.09						
3. Leader Position Power	3.67	.65	.14	.07					
4. Leader Political Skill	5.52	.72	.17*	.05	.22**	(.91)			
5. Initiating Structure	3.45	.45	.01	.08	-.04	.14	(.89)		
6. Consideration	3.83	.48	-.12	-.02	-.10	.03	.42**	(.94)	
7. Follower Job Satisfaction	3.82	.43	.15*	-.08	.07	.11	.35**	.51**	(.88)

*Note.* *N* = 190 leaders and 476 followers; Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; Initiating Structure. = follower perceived; Consideration = follower perceived; Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are in the diagonal

\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01.

Table 2

*Regression Analyses of Perceived Initiating Structure and Perceived Consideration*

	Perceived Initiating Structure			Perceived Consideration		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Leader Age	.02	.01	.00	-.12	-.12	.12
Leader Gender	.08	.08	.09	-.03	-.03	-.02
Leader Position Power		-.08	-.05		-.10	-.08
Leader Political Skill (PSI)		.15	.12		.07	.05
Position Power $\times$ PSI			.22**			.15 <sup>+</sup>
$R^2$	.01	.03	.08*	.02	.03	.05
$\Delta R^2$	.03	.02	.05**		.01	.02 <sup>+</sup>

*Note.*  $N = 190$  leaders and 476 followers; Gender: 1 = male; 2 = female; position power and political skill were centered.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .051$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 3

*Regression Analyses of Follower Job Satisfaction*

	Follower Job Satisfaction				
	Model 7	Model 8a	Model 8b	Model 9	Model 10
Leader Age	.15 <sup>*</sup>	.20 <sup>**</sup>	.13	.12	.18 <sup>**</sup>
Leader Gender	-.07	-.07	-.08	-.07	-.07
Leader Position Power			.04	.06	.11
Leader Political Skill (PSI)			.08	.06	.02
Position Power $\times$ PSI				.17 <sup>*</sup>	.07
Perceived Initiating Structure		.16 <sup>*</sup>			.14 <sup>**</sup>
Perceived Consideration		.46 <sup>**</sup>			.47 <sup>**</sup>
$R^2$	.03	.33 <sup>**</sup>	.04	.06 <sup>*</sup>	.34 <sup>**</sup>
$\Delta R^2$		.30 <sup>**</sup>	.01	.03 <sup>*</sup>	.28 <sup>**</sup>

*Note.*  $N = 190$  leaders and 476 followers; Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; position power and political skill were centered.

<sup>+</sup> $p < .05$ ,  $^*p < .05$ ,  $^{**}p < .01$

Figure 1

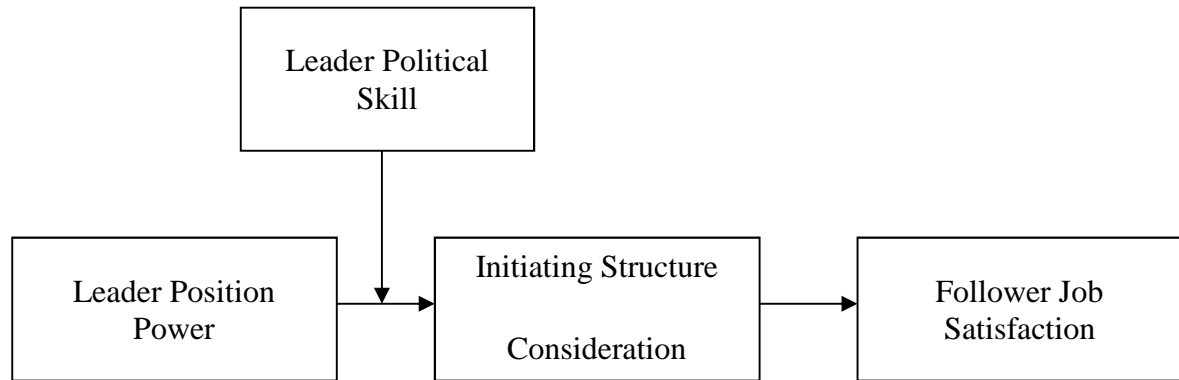
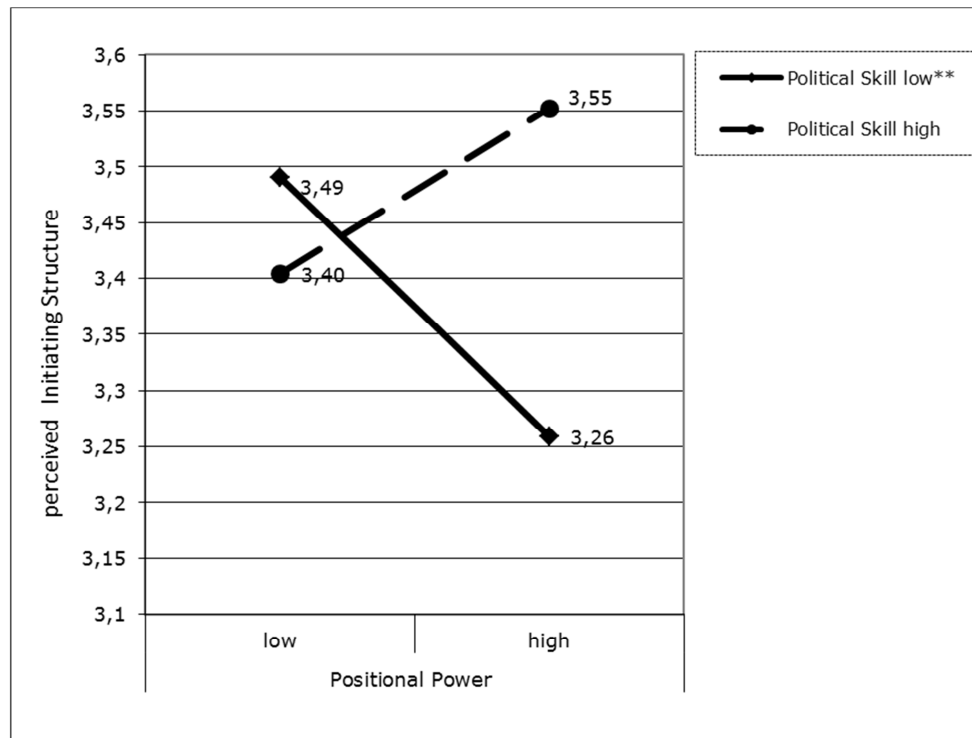
*Research Model of the Study*

Figure 2

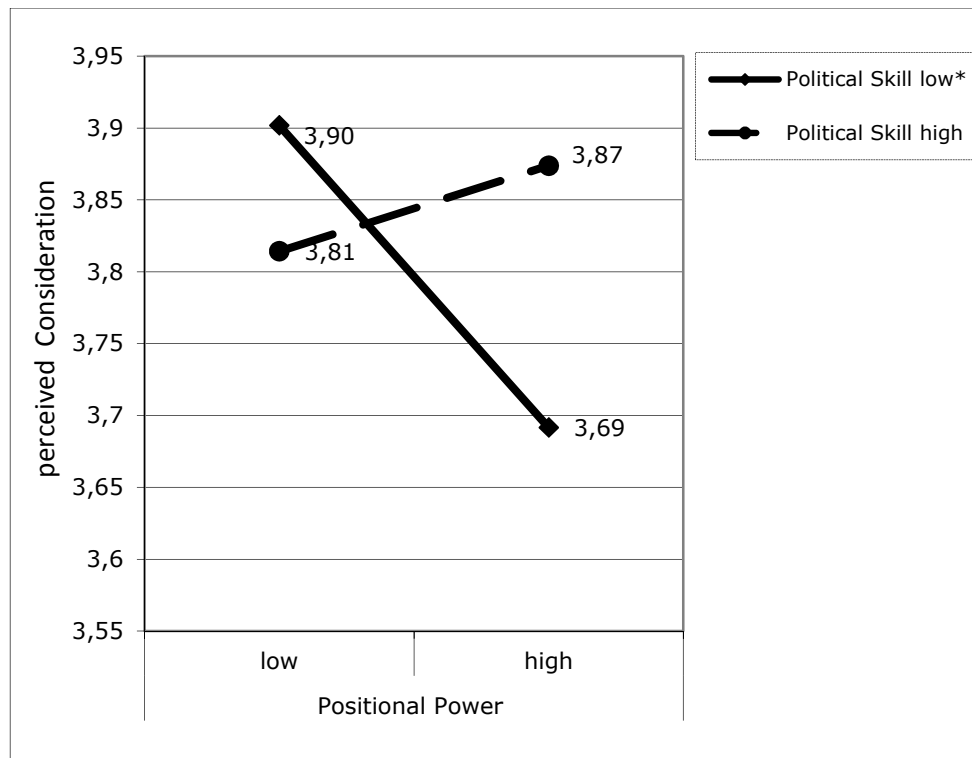
*Interaction of Leader Position Power x Political Skill on Perceived Initiating Structure*



*Note.*  $N = 190$  leaders and 476 followers; regression slope of low Political Skill:  $*p < .01$ .

Figure 3

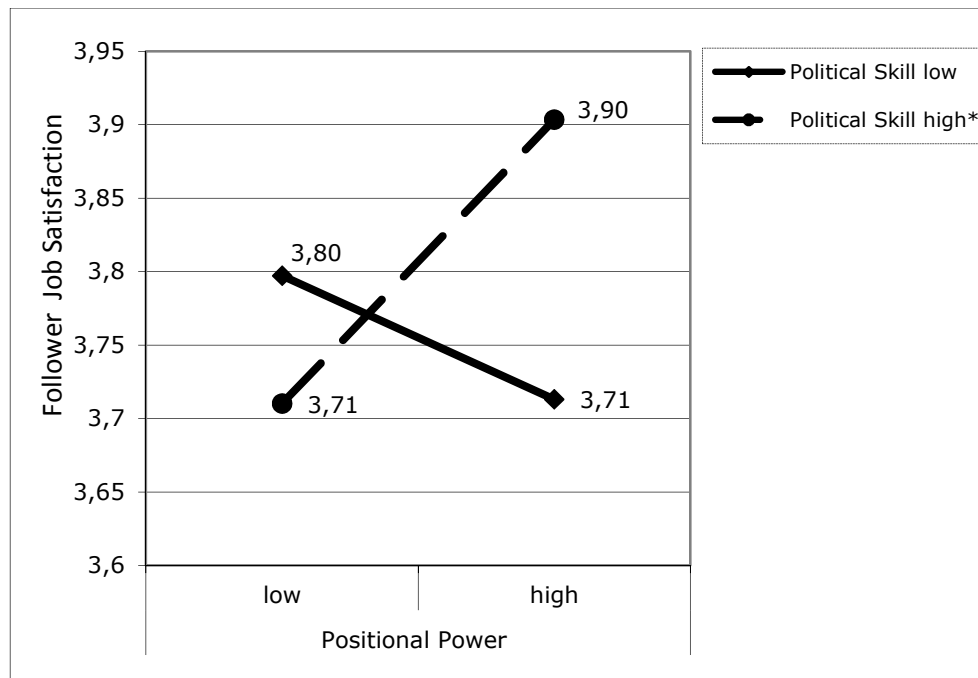
*Interaction of Leader Position Power x Political Skill on Perceived Consideration*



*Note.*  $N = 190$  leaders and 476 followers; regression slope of low Political Skill:  $*p < .05$ .

Figure 4

*Interaction of Leader Position Power x Political Skill on Follower Job Satisfaction*



*Note.*  $N = 190$  leaders and 476 followers; regression slope of high Political Skill:  $*p < .05$ .